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# PERSPECTIVES OF CENTRAL EUROPEAN MULTINATIONAL DEFENCE COOPERATION: A NEW MODEL?

1.

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## *Introduction*

*Current trends of defence cooperation in Europe*

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## **List of abbreviations:**

AGS – Allied Ground Surveillance System

CBRN – Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear

CDP – Capability Development Plan

C-IED – Counter-Improvised Explosive Devices

JLSG – Joint Logistics Support Group

MLCC – Multinational Logistic Co-ordination Centre

NORDAC – Nordic Armaments Co-operation

NORDCAPS – Nordic Coordinated Arrangement for Military Peace Support

NORDSUP – Nordic Supportive Defence Structures

PESCO – Permanent Structured Co-operation

PCC – Prague Capabilities Commitment

P&S – Pooling & Sharing

SAC – Strategic Airlift Capability

SOF – Special Operations Forces

## **Introduction**

The financial crisis triggered the impression among European states that the negative effects of the further decreasing defence budgets could be tackled by tighter defence cooperation especially on capability development. New initiatives have emerged both within NATO and the European Union in this regard, but interestingly, new parallel defence co-operations have also been created and old ones revitalized on the sub-regional level. Namely, although NATO and EU provide many robust mechanisms for defence co-operation within the frameworks of Smart Defence in NATO and Pooling & Sharing in EU (Ghent process), bilateral and regional initiatives – like the Benelux Defence Cooperation, the British-French ‘Lancaster House Treaties’, the Baltic Defence Cooperation and the Nordic Defence Cooperation – also flourish. Similarly to the European trends, regional defence co-operation has intensified in Central Europe for the past couple of years as well. Two co-operative frameworks are important in this regard: the Visegrad Group (V4) and the Central European Defence Initiative (CEDI).

In this paper we argue that although the V4 cooperation has been more visible and has become more widely discussed lately (Kiss 2011; Bátorá and Matlary 2011; Tarasovič 2011; Weiss

<sup>1</sup> Views of the author are his own and do not represent those of the Hungarian Ministry of Defence

2012; Šuplata 2013a; Šuplata 2013b; Lorenz 2013) thanks to the creation of the Visegrad Battlegroup which will be on standby in 2016, the V4 cooperation is rather a late adaptation to an earlier call of the EU for creating Battlegroups than an answer for the problems of today. We attempt to point out that the Central European Defence Initiative launched in 2011 fits more to the current trends of defence cooperation in Europe as it intends to mitigate capability shortfalls by practical cooperation. We argue that such flexible frameworks of cooperation as CEDI, serve better as ‘incubators’ for novel defence cooperation initiatives. To argue this, in the first part of the paper we describe the main trends of defence cooperation in Europe, including the strengthening of regional cooperative efforts of the past years. Thereafter, we introduce the current processes of V4 cooperation and the Central European Defence Initiative, and finally we compare them to the current European trends. Here we use Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEF) as the main reference point.

### **Current trends of defence cooperation in Europe**

In the 2000s two main trends were identifiable in Europe regarding defence cooperation.

First, European states focused on military capability development packages within NATO and EU, and second they created rapid reaction forces under the aegis of these two organisations. Based on the lessons learnt from earlier initiatives, NATO launched the NATO Response Force (NRF) and identified the Prague Capabilities Commitment (PCC) package at the 2002 Summit in Prague (Prague Summit Declaration 2002) as required capability targets. With the creation of NRF, NATO intended to establish “a technologically advanced, flexible, deployable, interoperable and sustainable force, including land, sea and air elements ready to react quickly whenever needed” (Prague Summit Declaration 2002). However, PCC could not realize every capability target, and later the Alliance decided to concentrate on specific ‘high priority capability development areas’ of the Comprehensive Political Guidance adopted at the Riga Summit in 2006 (Comprehensive Political Guidance 2006). Lastly the Lisbon Capabilities Package – adopted at the 2010 Lisbon Summit – determined the direction of the Alliance’s capability development focusing on the needs of NATO’s ISAF mission and other long-existing critical shortfall areas (Lisbon Summit Declaration 2010).

At the same time, the European Union developed the EU Battlegroup concept and established the European Defence Agency. EU Battlegroups were defined as battalion-sized forces (approximately 1,500 troops) capable of deployment in 15 days and to be sustained for 30 days or 120 days by rotation in crisis management operations. According to the concept, two EU Battlegroups were to be available at any particular point in time with individual battlegroups following a six month rotation. EDA was intended to be the catalyst of European defence cooperation in crisis management capabilities by developing capabilities, promoting cooperation on research and technology (R&T) and armaments and also fostering competitive European Defence Equipment Market. EDA, together with the EU Military Committee (EUMC), played a key role in elaborating the Capability Development Plan (CDP) in 2008, which defined “future capability needs from the short to longer term.” More recently, the Lisbon Treaty provided the opportunity for the creation of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) in defence for “those [European Union] Member States whose military capabilities fulfil higher criteria and which have made more binding commitments to one another in this area with a view to the most demanding missions (Treaty of Lisbon, Article 42.6.).”

Because of the disagreements among European states regarding PESCO’s realization and especially due to the negative effects of the financial crisis, the EU began to focus on more practical approaches of ‘pooling’ of capabilities to mitigate the negative financial effects. Thus, EU defence ministers put the concept of Pooling & Sharing (P & S) to the top of the agenda of EU defence policy at their meeting in Ghent in September 2010. At the Munich Security Conference in February 2011, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen launched an initiative very similar to the Ghent Process in NATO, called ‘Smart Defence’ (Rasmussen 2011). According to Rasmussen, “Smart Defence is about building security for less money by working together and being more flexible (Rasmussen 2012, 5).”

Parallel with these processes within NATO and EU new regional and bilateral defence collaborations have emerged and old ones have been revitalized. Among others the United Kingdom and France signed the so-called Lancaster House Treaties in 2010 on cooperation in strategically crucial fields. In 2012, the Ministers of Defence of the Benelux states signed a declaration

on defence cooperation to reinvigorate their long-standing defence collaboration. In 2011, the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) announced new defence cooperation initiatives on “sharing national infrastructures for training purposes and specialisation of training areas” and “collective formation for contingents” within NRF (National Defence Republic of Lithuania 2011).

In 2009, the five Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden – established the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFECO) which covers almost the whole spectrum of their defence sectors in order to achieve cost-effectiveness and enhanced operational capability. “The main aim and purpose of the Nordic Defence Cooperation is to strengthen the participating nations’ national defence, explore common synergies and facilitate efficient common solutions” (Nordefeco). The Nordic countries also had a well institutionalized system for military collaboration before the creation of NORDEFECO. In the 1990s they established the Nordic Armaments Cooperation (NORDAC) in order to coordinate their military development and procurement programmes, created the Nordic Coordinated Arrangement for Military Peace Support (NORDCAPS) to provide “joint Nordic training for peace support operations, as well as coordinated Nordic contributions to capacity building and security sector reform in weak and developing states” (Saxi 2011, 16). Finally, in 2008 Norway, Sweden and Finland decided to establish Nordic Supportive Defence Structures (NORDSUP) to co-operate more deeply in training, logistics and production (Saxi 2011, 17). In 2009 NORDEFECO merged these three different cooperative frameworks, thus operating as a clearing house for defence related collaborations in the Nordic region. The biggest advantage of NORDEFECO is its flexibility. As Juha Jokela and Tuomas Iso-Markku point out “whereas some earlier Nordic endeavours have suffered from lack of interest by one or several of the Nordic states, NORDEFECO allows for any form of cooperation, be it bilateral, trilateral or multilateral. At the same time, existing forms of cooperation are open for the other Nordic states to join at any point” (Jokela and Iso-Markku 2013, 9).

### **Central European defence collaborations**

As mentioned above, we can differentiate between two multinational frameworks of defence cooperation in Central

Europe – that of the Visegrad Countries (V4) and the Central European Defence Initiative (CEDI, previously known as the Central European Roundtable on Defence Cooperation). International experts have been paying ever more attention to these multinational forms of defence cooperation and military capability development since the financial crisis hit the defence sector in Central Europe with an austerity not seen since the end of the Cold War.<sup>2</sup> Recently comparative expert papers have also been prepared with focus on the lessons learnt from existing defence cooperation frameworks and identifying the best suitable practices that might be able to further enhance and bring forward these collaborations (Valasek and Suplata, 2012; Budai, 2013). The obvious reason for this renewed interest is the momentum that the Visegrad Cooperation and CEDI have been gathering since 2011.

After the defence dimension of the Visegrad Cooperation was relatively fruitless for two decades, 2011-2012 brought V4 countries to a new level: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia decided to establish a joint EU Battlegroup. Even though there is still a long way to go to make the V4 Battlegroup a reality, it is beyond doubt a first step of pooling capabilities. CEDI, born as the Central European Roundtable on Defence Cooperation in 2011, has received less attention as this new framework for defence collaboration among Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia has been functioning rather as an ‘incubator’ for new, practical initiatives that can be realized on the ground in the short term. The potential in CEDI, however, seems to be substantial, as several actual projects have successfully been carried out by participating states.

It is obvious that these two frameworks differ significantly in terms of structure, institutionalization, membership and the way they function, and have triggered successful initiatives to a varying degree. As we attribute the different dynamics behind the functioning of these defence collaborations to the different setup that characterizes them, the following subchapters will briefly assess and compare these, highlighting those characteristics that are more capable of bringing cooperation forward based on the experience gained and lessons learned so far.

<sup>2</sup> On the V4 see: Kiss, 2011; Weiss, 2012, Valasek and Suplata, 2012. On CEDI see: Csiiki and Németh, 2012, Kurowska and Németh, 2013

## V4 defence cooperation

Cooperation among the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland in the framework of the Visegrad Group – or Visegrad Four (V4) – dates back to 1991 when regional cooperation in Central Europe was pursued in order to mutually enhance the chances of Euro-Atlantic integration of these four (then three with Czechoslovakia being one federative state) countries. It was determined however that the cooperation of the Visegrad countries would be based on wide-ranging areas, including political, economic and cultural ones on which all participants wished to cooperate along shared interests. Regional patterns of cooperation among these countries in defence-related matters have taken place only on a limited scale even after NATO and EU accessions for example by harmonizing point of views and adopting joint declarations on defence and foreign policy. Nevertheless despite their respective contributions to NATO collective defence and operations, as well as to EU CSDP, a characteristic ‘V4 defence project’ has not appeared until 2011.

Following two fruitless decades in this field, the four countries agreed to establish a European Union Battlegroup in May 2011 – expected to become operational and be on standby in the first half of 2016. The role of the lead nation of the Visegrad Battlegroup is undertaken by Poland, also providing the majority of the troops (900), while the Czech Republic provides 750, Hungary 510 and Slovakia 450 troops. Negotiations on force generation are under way as the V4 Ministers of Defence signed their Letter of Intent (LoI) at their meeting on March 6, 2013 on creating the Battlegroup. In addition Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) and Technical Agreements (TA) are under preparation to make practical cooperation possible. Having a modular structure, the leading roles for 7 out of 8 functional modules have already been divided among the participants. However, critical capability shortfalls are still on the table, combat and transport helicopters and strategic airlift among others that will need to be provided (Tófalvi, 2013). Other issues, including the permanence of the Battlegroup as a sustained capability package among the V4 countries and the possible application of the BG have also remained topics for further negotiation.

Moreover, the V4 Battlegroup gives an old answer to an old question dating back to 2004 by pooling the types of capabilities



that might never be applied in practice as the European Union lacks the necessary political commitment so far to use the much-appreciated Battlegroups even in times of need. Even if it did allow their use in a future EU crisis management operation, we must admit that the focus must be on filling the missing military capabilities as the primary target of any new initiatives in defence cooperation, which goes beyond just incorporating the existing units into new force structures. Achieving this bears significant value for providing capable, deployable multinational units that could not be provided on a national basis, but is less likely to fill capability shortfalls that could be covered only through deeper cooperation in the form capability sharing (joint procurement and development).

It is beyond doubt that the V4 Battlegroup has become the flagship project of the Visegrad countries – and practically the only such project that has been born and nurtured as a V4 defence project. The reasons why cooperation in defence has been limited compared to other fields (energy policy being a successful example) is in our opinion due to the setup and characteristics of the cooperation, in particular the following:

- V4 is a structured, institutionalized framework for cooperation, thus it is more rigid;
- V4 is made up of uneven partners regarding size, resources and capabilities (three small ones and a middle-size country exceeding their combined size), thus it invites dependencies and inequalities;
- V4 projects are initiated based on the consensual participation of all four Visegrad countries serving as a shared platform of initiatives, thus limiting the opportunity of spontaneous collaborations by two or three partners.

These aspects limit the opportunities of cooperation to a certain extent, especially in the early period of incubating and nurturing newborn ideas when it is especially important to ensure flexibility to find suitable solutions. Since both policy makers and experts agree (see for example: Rasmussen, 2012, Valasek and Suplata, 2012) that flexibility and adaptability are key enablers to successful co-operation, less rigid and regulated, and more tailored-to-needs forms of cooperation should be given preference, as is explained below.



## Central European Defence Initiative

A brand new framework for defence cooperation among Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia began in 2011, originally called the Central European Roundtable on Defence Co-operation, more recently named Central European Defence Initiative. This framework includes the fields of training, operations and capability development and has achieved the following results by 2013 (Tófalvi, 2013):

- Following upon the Czech initiative a multinational Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) a defence battalion has been created involving the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia among the CEDI countries and extended to include Poland, also becoming the lead nation of the battalion, including a successful Smart Defence program. Other countries have also expressed their interest in the formation.

- Based on the 'food for thought' paper produced by Austria and Croatia, bilateral cooperation in the field of training Special Operations Forces (SOF) is underway by now and might be further extended to other CEDI countries offering joint SOF training.

- As the Multinational Logistic Co-ordination Centre (MLCC) was established in the Czech Republic in 2010, a regionally focused initiative to create a multinational Joint Logistics Support Group (JLSG) is now on the table. MLCC has become a Smart Defence Tier 1 project since then.

- Hungary produced a 'food for thought' paper on Counter-Improvised Explosive Devices (C-IED) cooperation and in this framework 'Train the Trainers' and 'Weapons Intelligence Team' (WIT) activities have been successful in sharing lessons learned.

- The joint training of Czech, Croatian and Hungarian Air Mentor Teams for Afghanistan begun thanks to the negotiations taking place within CEDI and has been successfully taking place since, in parallel with negotiations on deeper regional cooperation in aviation training.

Based on these projects, we can genuinely state that initiatives nurtured in the CEDI framework have proven to be successful, evolving both in terms of participants, attracting additional countries to join, and in terms of integration into NATO Smart Defence programs. Thus, even though literature on CEDI is limited (Csiki and Németh, 2012), based on the experience gathered so far we can already outline the fundamental characteristics of this framework:

- CEDI is not structured and has remained un-institutionalized, thus providing more flexible options for negotiation (building on expert-level meetings and the formal meetings of Defence Policy Directors as well as the informal meetings of Ministers of Defence);

- CEDI is made up of relatively even partners regarding size, resources and capabilities (six small countries, none possessing disproportionately greater capabilities);

- CEDI projects are initiated based on voluntary participation of any partner countries, giving them the option to choose *à la carte* among defence cooperation initiatives without formal obligations.

This means that the participants of CEDI build practical and more flexible forms of cooperation, starting with the spontaneous cooperation of 2-3 countries, with CEDI playing the role of an open forum and clearing house. As experience has shown, there are cases when the ‘incubation’ period was so successful that more countries also joined the initiative, developing it into broader regional as well as viable Smart Defence programs. Significantly, CEDI seems to be more fruitful and effective than Visegrad 4 formalised cooperation.

### **How do Central European defence collaborations fit the main European trends?**

We can draw further conclusions by comparing the two main frameworks of military cooperation in Central Europe – V4 and CEDI – to the current European trends. The creation of the Visegrad Battlegroup is a great achievement for the Central European region, compared to what Central European regional initiatives have achieved since the end of the Cold War. Basically, the Central European countries could not establish a single viable, significant regional defence initiative. Probably, this is the reason why many analysts took notice of the news of the creation of the Visegrad Battlegroup, and not for other Battlegroups.

At the same time, we have to recognize that the Visegrad Battlegroup tries to answer a demand which emerged ten years ago when the EU Battlegroup concept had been framed in 2004. At that time many believed that these force packages will provide the answer for response capabilities for smaller crises, but the usefulness and applicability of EU Battlegroups have

been questioned as they have never been used despite the fact that there was a demand for it from the international community (Major and Mölling, 2011, Hatzigeorgopoulos 2012). In addition, Tomáš Weiss highlights that the Visegrad Battlegroup “is not and cannot be the answer to the region’s difficulty in sustaining a reasonable level of military power.” Thus, “development of further common capabilities should follow, starting with training, schooling, and maintenance” (Weiss, 2011). Accordingly, we can perceive the creation of the Visegrad Battlegroup as a late adaptation for a decade old demand of generating rapid reaction forces and capability development packages rather than fitting into the current trend of European defence collaborations at a time when everyone focuses on cost effectiveness and Pooling & Sharing of capabilities.

On the contrary, CEDI provides a forum for six Central European countries where they can raise potential areas of practical cooperation and each and every country is free to join and contribute. Thus, cooperation is forged on the grounds of flexible and practical mechanisms while there is no ‘institutional pressure’ – as would have been the case in the Visegrad format, where the support of all participating countries is necessary to begin to cooperate on any issue. Last but not least, all participating countries in CEDI have about the same level of resources and military manpower, providing equal weight and influence, unlike the Visegrad Group, which includes Poland, which is often considered the ‘lead nation’ (Budai, 2013).

It is also important to note that CEDI has not just provided the grounds for new initiatives, but in the cases of the Joint Logistics Support Group and the CBRN Battalion these initiatives had been extended to include all Visegrad countries (and even beyond), thus becoming a successful ‘incubator of ideas’ for the V4 cooperation, which had later on trickled into NATO’s Smart Defence framework in which such ‘grass-root initiatives’ can complement large-scale multinational capability development (e.g. procurement) programs.

We can summarize the lessons learned with regard to V4, CEDI and NORDEFECO in the below comparison based on the characteristics of each that have been discussed throughout the paper (the summary of the characteristics of NORDEFECO is provided partly based upon Bátor and Matlary, 2011):

<sup>5</sup> That loose, 100+-member body was also chaired by Lithuania from mid-2009 to mid-2011 and has five Central European countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, and Romania) on its 25-member Governing Council.

Characteristics	V 4	CEDI	NORDEFCO
Structured, institutionalized framework	YES	NO	YES
Partners and their capabilities	UNEVEN	EVEN	UNEVEN
Participation mechanisms	CONSENSUAL MORE RIGID	FREE-TO-JOIN MORE FLEXIBLE	FREE-TO-JOIN MORE FLEXIBLE
Function	PLATFORM	FORUM AND CLEARING HOUSE	FORUM AND CLEARING HOUSE
Provides answers to	EARLIER NEEDS	CURRENT NEEDS	CURRENT NEEDS

Nevertheless CEDI and V4 cooperation should not be seen as competitive frameworks but rather as collaborations that can complement each other. There are situations when the presence and the weight of a strong lead nation is necessary for creating successful defence cooperation, especially when the collaboration exceeds the usual bi- and trilateral frameworks. Good examples of this are the Strategic Airlift Capability (SAC) and Allied Ground Surveillance System (AGS) in NATO, where the role of the United States has been indispensable for leading many nations to establish big projects. Because of its size and defence budget, Poland could play a similar leading role in Central Europe where the Visegrad framework could be at the core in cases involving costly and complicated military collaborations where the contribution of several countries is needed. At the same time CEDI can remain the primary forum for creating bi- and trilateral defence collaborations among similar sized Central European states, because of its flexibility and clearing house role. This division of labour between CEDI and V4 can provide a healthy environment for fulfilling different needs regarding military cooperation in Central Europe.

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